



Bullying: Information for Parents and Carers

Opinion surveys show that bullying is one of the main concerns that parents and carers have about their children's safety and well being. As a parent it is right that you want your child to be safe and well. To find out that your child is being bullied or may be using bullying behaviours against someone else is distressing. It can make you feel guilty, sad, worried, frightened, frustrated or helpless. The information on these pages should help you to deal with this situation if it arises.

What types of bullying are there?

Listed below are some of the different methods of bullying. It is important to remember that if something does not appear on this list and it is upsetting your child, then you should still talk to someone you trust. There are a number of different reasons that somebody might be bullying but it is more likely the reason is something to do with them rather than your child.

- **verbal;** name calling, threatening,
- **theft;** taking or damaging your things,
- **rumors;** spreading lies about someone or people close to them,
- **physical;** Kicking, punching etc,
- **cyber-bullying;** making abusive phone calls, sending threatening messages,
- **isolation;** making people feel left out.

We also know that sometimes people get bullied because of other people's prejudices, for example;-

Racist Bullying - Bullying that is directed at an individual of a particular race, group or culture. If this is happening to your child it might be an individual saying something unkind about:

- the way someone look,
- what someone eats,
- the way that somebody dresses,
- the way someone speaks,
- family,
- religion.

Homophobic bullying – bullying that is directed at someone because of their “perceived” sexual orientation. Homophobic bullying can happen to anyone, it does not matter what your sexual orientation is. If this is happening to your child it might be an individual saying something unkind about someone being:

- gay,
- lesbian,
- bisexual,
- trans gender.

Special educational needs - Sometime people might get bullied because of the way someone views someone with a disability or learning difficulty.

How do I know if my child is being bullied?

Something may have changed to raise your concern. Below are some of the signs that you should look for

- a drop in achievement,
- damaged clothes or property,
- not wanting to go to school,
- truancy,
- a change in eating habits,
- keep losing their money,
- moodiness or bad temper,
- coming home with marks and bruises,
- sudden loss of interest in recreational activities including stopping going online,
- falling out with their friends,
- disrupted sleep and or having nightmares,
- bed wetting in younger children,
- feeling ill in the mornings,
- signs of being worried,
- a loss of confidence,
- unusually quiet.

If you notice some of these changes in your child’s behaviour it might be a sign that they are being bullied. It is, however, important to remember that there may be other explanations.

What should I do if I am concerned that my child is being bullied?

Step One

If you think your child is being bullied then start by asking them some questions like the ones below to try and help you find out more. Listen and talk to your child and offer reassurance.

- Who have they played with?
- What have they enjoyed at school?
- Are they feeling happy about going to school the next day?
- Did anything happen that they did not like?
- Who are their friends?
- Is there anything at school they are not happy about?
- Is there anything they would like to be different?

Following your conversation if you're still concerned about bullying you may decide to contact the setting where the bullying is happening. This may be your child's school, youth club, sports club or any other setting where your child spends time. It is important that you reassure your child that they have done the right thing in telling you. You need to be clear about what actions you are taking and the reasons why. Keep your child informed about what you are going to do. It is important not to confront the child who you suspect has been bullying, or their parents, yourself.

Make sure your child knows you are going to support them.

Step Two

Tell your child's school (this applies to other settings)

- After chatting with your child, if you do feel there is a problem and you think that bullying is happening at your child's school, you should contact the school.
- Explain the situation clearly and calmly as it might be the first time the school has heard of the issues. The school will have a policy for dealing with reports of bullying behavior. It can be helpful to have read this prior to a meeting because it should tell you what your child's school does if bullying happens. It is important to remember that your child's school will want the bullying to stop. The best way to achieve this is to work together.
- It is usually helpful to arrange a meeting, depending on the seriousness. It is usually better in the first instance to suggest meeting with the class teacher or head of year. Explain your concerns clearly to the school and tell them what your child has told you.

Step three

Agree an action plan.

You need to agree a plan of support for your child with the school, and jointly monitor the situation. In most cases, by working with the school, bullying problems can be resolved quickly. Make sure that the plan clearly states how the school is going to communicate with you any actions that they have taken and plan to take. Also include who your child should speak to in the future if they are concerned and make sure that you listen to your child about who they feel comfortable talking to. Make sure you leave the meeting knowing who is going to take which actions and how and when.

What should I do if the situation still does not improve?

Bullying situations can often be very complex and take time to resolve it is important to give the school time to deal with the situation. If, after your initial meeting with the school, you still do not feel the situation has improved then it might be useful to speak to a more senior person in the school, for example the Head teacher. If you still do not feel that the situation has been resolved then a complaint can be made to the schools Chair of Governors. Your child's school can advise you on the process for doing this.

What should I do if I think my child is bullying other people?

It is important to remember that a child can be both a victim of bullying and possibly also involved in bullying others. Sometime a child or young person may not realise that what they are doing is hurting or upsetting the person they are bullying.

Is my child bullying others?

Spend some time talking with your child about what is happening. Ask them how they feel about school. What they do and don't enjoy. Ask your child about their friendship groups and try to find out more about them. If you think they are bullying others try to find out if they are doing this on their own or as part of a group. You need to ensure that your child has the opportunity to tell their side of the story.

It is important that you child understands that bullying behaviour is not acceptable but that there is support to help them change their behaviours. Make sure your child know that you still support them and love them but that their bullying behaviour must change.

Try to understand why this might be happening; is there something that is making your child unhappy? Is there something at home or out of school that might be causing upset?

Talk to your child about why bullying is wrong. It is important that your child understands the consequences of their behaviour.

You will need to talk to the school so that you can all work together to improve the situation. Your child may need help to find new behaviour to cope with difficult situations.

Useful websites:

<http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk/>

<http://www.kidscape.org.uk/>

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/>

<http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/>

<http://www.mencap.org.uk/>